
Iowa Fiscal Partnership

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Flooding Impacts in CR Hit Poor Hardest Report Shows Need for Timely, Targeted, Transitional Responses

DES MOINES, Iowa (Aug. 12, 2008) — June floods that devastated many parts of Iowa particularly affected low-income residents in the Cedar Rapids area, showing a need for targeted policy responses by the state.

Analysis of census data by the nonpartisan Iowa Fiscal Partnership showed the poverty rate of those in the flood-affected area of Cedar Rapids was 12.9 percent -- about 77 percent higher than that of the city generally and more than twice as high as Linn County overall. It also compared with an 8.8 percent poverty rate for the state.

“Those directly affected by flooding in Cedar Rapids live and work in areas that are substantially poorer than most of their community and the state,” said Charles Bruner, executive director of the Child & Family Policy Center (CFPC) in Des Moines.

CFPC and the Iowa Policy Project (IPP) in Iowa City cooperate in independent public policy analysis through the Iowa Fiscal Partnership (IFP), which on Tuesday released the first two reports in a series on responsible public policy responses to the floods.

As the report noted, while Cedar Rapids and Linn County are more prosperous than the state as a whole, the same cannot be said of the flooded areas.

“Particular efforts are likely to be needed in meeting basic needs and offering emergency relief to those affected,” Bruner said. “It’s also important to recognize that low-income people need to be represented in the rebuilding process, which includes developing effective policies.”

David Osterberg, executive director of the IPP, said the Cedar Rapids data point to the need for state policy makers to chart flood responses based on principles similar to those accepted for economic stimulus. One of the two reports sets out those principles as guidelines for flood response.

“Policies must be timely, targeted and transitional,” Osterberg said. “They have to be implemented when they can effectively help, they have to be able to reach those most directly affected and in need of assistance, and they need to be temporary with time-specific goals.

“Everyone involved in the ongoing and coming policy discussion needs to recognize the validity of a principles-based response, developed on the experiences of other states that have coped with disasters. This approach not only will best serve Iowa residents, but help us to provide a good example for the future.”

Iowa Fiscal Partnership reports are on the web at <http://www.iowafiscal.org>.

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